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COORDINATION OF THE POLICIES AND ACTIVITIES OF THE SPECIALIZED AGENCIES AND OTHER BODIES OF THE UNITED NATIONS SYSTEM RELATED TO THE FOLLOWING THEME: COORDINATED FOLLOW-UP BY THE UNITED NATIONS SYSTEM AND IMPLEMENTATION OF THE RESULTS OF MAJOR INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCES ORGANIZED BY THE UNITED NATIONS IN THE ECONOMIC, SOCIAL AND RELATED FIELDS

Possible common themes for follow-up of major international conferences at the coordination segment of the substantive session of the Economic and Social Council in 1996

Note by the Secretary-General

1. In its Agreed Conclusions 1995/1 (see A/50/3, chap. III, sect. A), the Economic and Social Council invited the Secretary-General, taking into account the suggestions made in paragraph 57 of his report (E/1995/86) and based on the work of relevant subsidiary bodies and through consultations with Member States, relevant organs of the United Nations system and specialized agencies, to offer suggestions for possible common themes for follow-up of major international conferences for consideration and decision by the Council concerning its coordination segment.

I. PROPOSALS BY MEMBER STATES

2. The Secretary-General carried out informal consultations with Member States on 22 and 28 November 1995, as a result of which he received written proposals from Spain, on behalf of the European Union, and Canada.

3. The European Union proposed as a theme "Coordination of the United Nations system activities for poverty eradication", which should focus on three aspects: (a) coordination of United Nations support for national poverty eradication plans, including the provision of basic social services, particularly at the

field level; (b) coordination of United Nations efforts to ensure that its development programmes for poverty eradication take fully into account the gender perspective; and (c) ways of monitoring United Nations performance in the field of poverty eradication, in particular through the harmonization of multi-year programmes of work of the functional commissions, within the framework of the coordinated follow-up to major United Nations conferences in the economic, social and related fields.

4. Canada, besides proposing a sectoral theme based on poverty eradication, submitted a topic in follow-up to the thirteenth paragraph of the Agreed Conclusions. Accordingly, the Economic and Social Council would determine how it intends to ensure the harmonization and coordination of the agendas and work programmes of functional commissions and might wish to conduct an initial review of multi-year thematic work programmes to identify areas where harmonization may be particularly required, bearing in mind the need for a clearer division of labour among the work of the commissions.

II. PROPOSAL BY THE SECRETARY-GENERAL

5. The Secretary-General also consulted with relevant bodies of the United Nations system and the specialized agencies through the Consultative Committee on Programme and Operational Questions (CCPOQ) at its seventh session. Taking into account the views expressed by Member States and by CCPOQ as well as the results of the Fourth World Conference on Women and the work of the Executive Board of UNICEF, the Trade and Development Board of UNCTAD, the Commission on Sustainable Development, the Commission on Human Rights, the Population and Development Commission, the Commission on Social Development, and the Commission on the Status of Women, it is suggested that "gender equality, equity and empowerment of women" could be selected as the common theme for the 1996 coordination segment of the Council. This theme figures prominently in almost all the conferences. It is also relevant to the work of almost all organizations of the system.

6. The wide-ranging set of measures of the Platform for Action adopted by the Fourth World Conference on Women (see A/CONF.177/20, chap. I, resolution 1) requires implementation through the work of all the bodies and organizations of the United Nations system, during the period 1995-2000. Implementation is to be specific, but also part of wider programming. As Governments have committed themselves to empowerment of women at previous global United Nations summits and conferences, coordination is recognized as all the more crucial for follow up of the World Conference. In paragraph 317 of the Platform for Action, the General Assembly and the Council are invited to review and strengthen the mandate of the Commission on the Status of Women, taking into account, inter alia, "the need for synergy with other related commissions and Conference follow-up, and for a system-wide approach to its implementation". The Council is also invited to ensure that its other functional commissions integrate a gender perspective into their work. The Secretary-General has indicated (see A/50/744) that he will propose to the Administrative Committee on Coordination the establishment of an inter-agency task force on the empowerment and advancement of women, within the framework of efforts for a coordinated follow-up to international conferences.

7. The World Summit on Children (see A/45/625, annex) emphasized the critical roles of women in the well being of children and the need to ensure equal opportunities to the girl child. It called for specific action to enhance the status of women, including their health status, and ensure their equal access to productive resources and education. The Summit established targets for the reduction of maternal mortality and eradication of illiteracy with an emphasis on female literacy, which have been reaffirmed and built upon by subsequent international meetings and conferences. The Plan of Action also called for gender disaggregated statistics, so as to ensure an equitable impact of programmes on girls and women. In reviewing the strategy of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) in basic education in 1995, the Executive Board called for placing a greater emphasis on targeting the inequality between girls and boys. In addition to the UNICEF Executive Board, other intergovernmental bodies are involved in the follow-up of the Summit's goals and targets.

8. In Agenda 21, adopted at the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (see A/CONF.151/26/Rev.1/(vol. I), resolution I, annex I), chapter 24 concerns "Global action for women towards sustainable and equitable development". This chapter is part of one of the five cross-sectoral clusters which the Commission on Sustainable Development adopted, at its first substantive session, for annual review in its multi-year thematic programme of work through 1997. At its third session, in 1995, the Commission, in view of the convening of the Fourth World Conference on Women, stressed the central role played by women in creating appropriate conditions for sustainable development and invited that Conference to fully include the need for sustainable development in its deliberations.

9. The Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action (see A/CONF.157/24 (Part I), chap. III), adopted by the World Conference on Human Rights, contains a number of references to the status of women. The chapter on "Equality, dignity and tolerance" has a specific section devoted to "The equal status and human rights of women". In paragraph 44 of this section it is urged that human rights of women should play an important role in the deliberations of the Fourth World Conference on Women. Under its sub-item entitled "Alternative approaches and ways and means within the United Nations system for improving the effective enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedoms", the Commission on Human Rights has been addressing the issue of human rights of women for a number of years. Most recently, at its fifty-first session (see E/1995/23), the Commission adopted resolutions on "The elimination of violence against women" (resolution 1995/85) and on the "Question of integrating the human rights of women into the human rights mechanisms of the United Nations" (resolution 1995/86), both of which address, inter alia, the Fourth World Conference on Women and the Commission on the Status of Women. In addition, the Commission also adopted resolutions on "Violence against women migrant workers" (resolution 1995/20) and on "Traffic in women and girls" (resolution 1995/25), both of which draw partly on the International Conference on Population and Development and address, inter alia, the Fourth World Conference on Women and the Commission on the Status of Women.

10. Advancing gender equality and equity and the empowerment of women are important ends of the Programme of Action adopted at the International Conference on Population and Development (see A/CONF.171/13, chap. I,

resolution 1). They are also recognized as essential conditions for achieving population and development objectives and the overall goal of sustainable development. Chapter IV of the Programme of Action contains a number of actions to empower women and to eliminate discrimination against the girl child and improve her welfare. The Programme of Action underscores the roles of men in promoting gender equality. A working group on women's empowerment was established by the task force on the implementation of the Programme of Action. Gender aspects are to receive special emphasis when, within the context of its multi-year programme of work, (see E/1995/27, annex I), the Commission on Population and Development reviews the theme of reproductive rights and reproductive health in 1996, the theme of international migration in 1997, and the theme of health and mortality in 1998. Relevant aspects will also be considered in the 1999 examination of population growth, structure and distribution. In reviewing the work programme for 1996-1997, the Commission on Population and Development noted that it was to take into account, inter alia, the outcome of the Fourth World Conference on Women.

11. Commitment 5 of the World Summit for Social Development (see A/CONF.166/9, chap. I, resolution 1) calls for equality and equity between men and women and for recognizing and enhancing the participation and leadership of women in all aspects of life and development. Specific measures for gender equality are contained throughout the Programme of Action. The work of the Commission on Social Development on the world social situation, on older persons, disabled persons and youth, or in the context of the international year of the family, is closely related to the status of women. For example, the World Programme of Action for Youth to the Year 2000 and Beyond (see A/50/728) has a section on girls and young women. The report of the United Nations Research Institute for Social Development reviewed by the Commission in 1995 contained a section on integrating gender into development policies. At its special session to be held in 1996, the Commission on Social Development is to decide upon its multi-year thematic programme of work to the year 2000 for the review of the Summit

12. The Joint inspection Unit devoted a report to the fiftieth session of the General Assembly to "Advancement of women through and in the programmes of the United Nations system: what happens after the fourth World Conference on Women" (A/50/509). The General Assembly will examine some of its recommendations for making the system's gender programmes more effective in the future. Discussions of gender issues at the coordination segment of the Council might contribute to implementation of this objective.

13. As this brief review shows, apart from being addressed prominently in recent conferences, this issue is being addressed in a variety of ways and from different perspectives both at the intergovernmental and inter-agency levels. It would therefore seem appropriate for the Council to consider how best to coordinate all these efforts to optimize results and minimize overlapping actions. It would also be timely for the Council to address this theme as part of the follow-up to the Beijing Conference.